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Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the International Conference “From Populorum progressio to Laudato si” (New Synod Hall, 23-24 November 2017)

The following is the letter sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the International Conference *From Populorum progressio to Laudato si*, organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and held in the Vatican’s New Synod Hall from 23 to 24 November 2017:

Letter of the Holy Father

Venerable Brother

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

In these days, convened by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the representatives of the various trade union organizations and workers’ movements met in Rome to reflect on and discuss the theme “From *Populorum progressio* to *Laudato si*”. Work and workers’ movements at the centre of integral, sustainable and fraternal human development”. I thank your Eminence and your collaborators, and cordially greet you all.

Blessed Paul VI, in his Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, states that “development ... cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded”, that is, it must fully promote the entire person, and also all people and populations.[1] And since “a person flourishes in work”,[2] the social doctrine of the Church has highlighted on several occasions that this is not one issue among many, but rather the “essential key” to the whole social question.[3] Indeed, work “is the condition not only for economic development but also for the cultural and moral development of persons, the family, society”.[4]

As a basis for human realization, work is a key to spiritual development. According to Christian tradition, it is more than merely “doing”; it is, above all, a mission. We collaborate in the creative work of God when, through our work, we cultivate and preserve creation (cf. *Gen 2: 15*);[5] we share in the Spirit of Jesus, His redemptive mission, when by means of our activity we give sustenance to our families and respond to the needs of our

neighbour. Jesus, Who “devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the carpenter's bench”,^[6] and consecrated His public ministry to freeing people from sickness, suffering and death,^[7] invites us to follow His steps through *work*. In this way, “every worker is the hand of Christ that continues to create and to do good”.^[8]

Work, as well as being essential to the realization of a person, is also a key to social development. “Work is work with others and work for others”,^[9] and the fruit of this act offers “occasions for exchange, relationship and encounter”.^[10] Every day, millions of people cooperate in development through their manual or intellectual activities, in large cities or rural areas, with sophisticated or simple assignments. All are expressions of a concrete love for the promotion of the common good, of a civil love.^[11]

Work can not be considered as a commodity or a mere tool in the production chain of goods and services,^[12] but rather, since it is the foundation for development, it takes priority over any other factor of production, including capital.^[13] Hence the ethical imperative of “defending jobs”^[14], and of creating new ones in proportion to the increase in economic viability,^[15] as well as ensuring the dignity of the work itself.^[16]

However, as Paul VI observed, one must not exaggerate the “mystique” of work. The person “is not only work”; there are other human needs that we must cultivate and consider, such as family, friends, and rest.^[17] It is important, therefore, to remember that any work must be at the service of the person, not the person in the service of work,^[18] and this implies that we must question structures that damage or exploit people, families, societies and our mother earth.

When the economic development model is based solely on the material aspect of the person, or when it benefits some people only, or when it damages the environment, it provokes a cry, from both the poor and from the earth, “pleading that we take another course”^[19]. This path, to be sustainable, must place the person and work at the centre of development, but integrating work and environmental concerns. Everything is interconnected, and we have to respond in a holistic way.^[20]

A valid contribution to this integral response from workers is to show to the world what you know well: the link between the three Ls: land, lodgings and labour [the three Ts: *tierra, techo y trabajo*].^[21] We do not want a system of economic development that increases the number of unemployed, or homeless, or landless. The fruits of the land and of labour are for all,^[22] and “should be in abundance for all in like manner”^[23]. This theme acquires special relevance with reference to land ownership, in both rural and urban areas, and the legal provisions that guarantee access to it.^[24] And in this regard, the quintessential criterion of justice is the “universal destination of goods”, whose universal right to use is the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order”.^[25]

It is pertinent to remember this today, as we prepare to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, and also at a time when economic, social and cultural rights demand greater consideration. But the promotion and the defence of such rights cannot be realized at the expense of the earth and of future generations. The interdependence between work and the environment obliges us to re-set the kinds of employment we want to see in the future and those that must be replaced or relocated, such as the activities of the combustible fossil fuel industry, which pollutes. A shift from the current energy industry to a more renewable one is unavoidable to protect our mother earth. But it is unjust for this movement to be paid for with the labour and homes of those most in need. Or rather, the cost of extracting energy from the earth, a universal common good, cannot fall on workers and their families. Trade unions and movements that know the connection between labour, homes and land have a great contribution to give in this respect, and must do so.

Another important contribution of workers for sustainable development is that of highlighting another triple connection: this time between *labour, time and technology*. With regard to time, we know that the “continued acceleration of changes” and the “intensified pace of life and work” which may be called “*rapidification*”, favour neither sustainable development nor its quality.^[26] We also know that technology, from which we receive many benefits and many opportunities, can be an obstacle to sustainable development when associated with a paradigm of power, rule and manipulation.^[27]

In the current context, known as the fourth industrial revolution, characterized by this “rapidification” and sophisticated digital technology, robotics and artificial intelligence,[28] the world is in need of voices such as ours. It is workers who, in their struggle for a just working day, learned to face a utilitarian, short-term and manipulative mentality. For this mindset, it does not matter if there is social and environmental degradation; it does not matter what one uses and what one discards; it does not matter if there is forced child labour or if a city’s river is polluted. The only thing that matters is immediate profit. Everything is justified on the basis of the god of money.[29] Given that many of you have contributed to combating this pathology in the past, today you are well placed to correct it in the future. I beg you to confront this difficult theme and to show us, in accordance with your prophetic and creative mission,[30] that a culture of encounter and care is possible. Today there is at stake not only the dignity of the employed, but also the dignity of the labour of all people, and the home of all people, our mother earth.

Therefore, and as I have affirmed in the Encyclical *Laudato si’*, we need a sincere and profound dialogue to redefine the idea of labour and the route of development.[31] But we cannot be ingenuous and think that dialogue will occur naturally and without conflict. There is a need for people who can work tirelessly to bring to life processes of dialogue at all levels: at the level of the business enterprise, the trade union, the movement; at the level of the neighbourhood, the city, regional, national and global. In this dialogue on development, all voices and visions are necessary, but especially the least-heard voices, those of the peripheries. I know the effort made by many people to make these voices emerge in the places where decisions are taken regarding work. I ask you to take on this noble commitment.

Experience tells us that, for a dialogue to be fruitful, it is necessary to start out from what we have in common. To dialogue on development it is useful to remember what unites us as human beings: our origin, belonging and destination.[32] On this basis, we can renew the universal solidarity of all peoples,[33] including solidarity with the peoples of tomorrow. In addition, we will be able to find a way of leaving behind the market- and finance-driven economy that does not accord to labour the value it deserves, and guide it towards another model in which human activity is at the centre.[34]

Trade unions and workers’ movements must by vocation be experts in solidarity. But to contribute to development in solidarity, I beg you to be on your guard against three temptations. The first is that of collectivist individualism, that is, protecting only the interests of those you represent, ignoring the rest of the poor, the marginalized and those excluded from the system. It is necessary to invest in a solidarity that goes beyond the walls of your associations, that protects the rights of workers, but above all of those whose rights are not even recognized. “Syndicate” is a beautiful word that derives from the Greek *dikein* (to make justice) and *syn* (together).[35] Please, make justice together, but in solidarity with all marginalized people.

My second request is to guard yourselves against the social cancer of corruption.[36] Just as, on certain occasions, “politics itself is responsible for the disrepute in which it is held, on account of corruption”,[37] the same can be said of unions. It is terrible to see the corruption of those who call themselves trade unionists, who make agreements with business leaders and are not interested in workers, leaving thousands of colleagues without work; this is a scourge that undermines relationships and destroys many lives and many families. Do not allow any illicit interests to ruin your mission, so necessary in the time in which we live. The world and the whole of creation aspire with hope to be freed of corruption (cf. *Rom* 8: 18-22). Be makers of solidarity and hope for all. Do not let yourselves be corrupted!

The third request is not to forget your role of educating consciences in solidarity, respect and care. The awareness of the labour and environmental crisis demands to be translated into new styles of life and public policies. To give life to such styles of life and law, we need institutions such as yours to cultivate social virtues that favour the flourishing of a new global solidarity, which enables us to flee from individualism and consumerism, and which motivate us to question the myths of indefinite material progress and a market without just rules.[38]

I hope that this Congress will produce a synergy able to propose concrete lines of action, starting from the perspective of workers, ways leading to human, integral, sustainable and fraternal development.

I thank you once again, Cardinal, and all those who have participated and offered their contribution, and I send my blessing to all.

From the Vatican, 23 November 2017.

[1] No. 14.

[2] *Address to the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL)*, 28 June 2017.

[3] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens* (1981), 3.

[4] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2005), no. 269.

[5] Cf. Vatican Ecumenical Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 34; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens* (1981), 25.

[6] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens* (1981), 6.

[7] *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 261.

[8] Saint Ambrose, *De obitu Valentiniani consolatio*, 62, cit. in *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 265.

[9] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1991), 31.

[10] *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 273; cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 125.

[11] Cf. *Address to the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL)*; cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 231,

[12] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens*, 7.

[13] Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 276.

[14] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 203.

[15] Cf. *ibid*, 204.

[16] Cf. *ibid*, 205.

[17] Cf. *Address to the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL)*.

[18] Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 272.

[19] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 53.

[20] Cf. *ibid.*, 16, 91, 117, 138, 240.

[21] Cf. *Address to participants in the world meeting of popular movements*, 5 November 2016.

[22] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 93.

[23] Cf. Vatican Ecumenical Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 69.

[24] Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 283.

[25] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 93.

[26] *Ibid.*, 18.

[27] Cf. *ibid.*, 102-206.

[28] Cf. J. Manyika, "Technology, jobs and the future of work", McKinsey Global Institute. Informative note prepared for the *Fortune-Time* World Forum, December 2016 (updated in February 2017).

[29] It is a dangerous "practical relativism"; cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 122.

[30] Cf. *Address to the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL)*.

[31] Cf. nn. 3 and 4.

[32] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 202.

[33] Cf. *ibid.*, 14, 58, 159, 172, 227.

[34] Cf. *Address to the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL)*.

[35] Cf. *ibid.*

[36] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 60.

[37] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 197.

[38] *Ibid.*, 209-215.
